

■ **Some employees accused me of creating a “hostile work environment” saying I show favoritism toward one gender when it comes to things like desirable assignments, who gets disciplined, or who receives good recommendations. I disagree with the complainers, but regardless, what’s the issue?**

Favoritism shown toward one gender makes it difficult for other employees to

compete fairly for assignments or desirable transfers. So, arguably, such favoritism will create obstacles and makes the work environment unfriendly or hostile to some employees based on gender. Employees need to feel safe and be encouraged to come forward and discuss their concerns. You and the workplace will benefit when you examine your supervisory practices and adjust the way you communicate with employees and offer assignments. Your ability to manage employee performance could be hampered by the perception that your supervision is unfair. Talk to the EAP and discuss your supervision style. You will be given objective feedback that may help you gain fresh insight. Incorporating certain tips on improving supervision skills often proves invaluable in improving relationships with employees, and ultimately in improved employee satisfaction and work performance. You may find this DOP course helpful: “Sexual Harassment Awareness and Prevention for Managers.” (Course No. 01-09-M327)

■ **Several of my employees’ spouses have lost jobs during the recession. Should I remind them about the availability of help from the EAP for family members and significant others? I believe some employees don’t make the connection and fail to realize how events like this impact entire families.**

Yes, remind employees during staff meetings or on other occasions that the

EAP is available to assist them as well as a spouse or partner at home. Many employees forget about assistance available from their EAP. You are correct when stating such events impact entire families. Children can be especially affected by a recession. According to a recent New York Times/CBS poll, it is reported that half the children in homes with an unemployed parent can be expected to experience behavioral changes. Currently, about one in seven children nationwide has an unemployed parent. Stress and depression may appear as difficult behaviors or poor school performance. Unexplained anger might be a problem that results from anxiety experienced in the home, and some parents may not associate child behavioral issues with the recession. An EA professional will discuss a variety of personal and family factors related to the impact of the recession and will provide helpful referrals. As a reminder, it is important to remember that supervisors need to be cautious and avoid analyzing individual employee issues.

■ **What traits should I look for in employees likely to become managers someday? Are good managers “born” or can people learn to become managers?**

Managerial skills can be taught. There are many behavioral traits, however,

that support the role of a good manager. Keeping an eye open for some of them can help you spot employees who might be management material. Look for employees who are: 1) comfortable with who they are and have positive views of themselves; 2) possess a corresponding interest in learning and growing; 3) assertive, value people, “get out in front,” and stay involved with the group; 4) honest; 5) able to make a decision, and able to be straightforward and “tell it like it is.” Employees who are hesitant to share bad news, overcautious about choices, or who withhold information others need to know typically struggle with the role of manager. Employees likely to be good managers avoid cliques. Instead, they reach out, believing everyone has a role to play and a valuable contribution to make. A manager does not have to be charismatic, but employees who make good managers demonstrate confidence that others see or sense.

■ **I have an ongoing struggle with documentation. When an employee is slow, appears tired, and acts sad, I call it “depressed.” It seems more to the point and descriptive. As a result, my documentation has been criticized. Not using labels is difficult. Can the EAP help me?**

An important part of employee assistance work is helping supervisors learn

the skills of documentation. Documentation can be tricky because you must document information that conveys what you see and hear but omits what you feel and conclude. This takes practice. It is tempting to focus on factors that are subjective and emotional. The key is to avoid drawing conclusions about personal problems. You must avoid stating how you feel about the employee’s behavior, conveying diagnostic impressions, or being dramatic. These things sabotage the usefulness of documentation for administrative purposes. To improve your documentation, consider whether it describes what is measurable or observable. “Depression” is one medical term to avoid using in documentation. Instead, document behaviors such as “slow talking,” “increased absenteeism, including days missed,” “lack of work progress,” “crying,” and “sad looks.” All of these are measurable and observable performance issues.

■ **I am a new supervisor and one of my responsibilities is teambuilding. Is teambuilding used to simply improve or reinforce the closeness that team members feel with each other? What is the goal?**

Teambuilding is an activity designed to improve team performance, but it

is often underutilized as a productivity tool. With this in mind, observe your team during the year to identify areas that represent opportunities for improvement. Once these goals are identified, target them with teambuilding. Avoid doing teambuilding only for “teambuilding’s sake.” In the end, inspiration gained from it will not last. How well do employees work together, problem-solve together, and participate in give-and-take behaviors? Is there a lot of bickering, gossip or bitterness? Do small cliques gang up on others? Is the retort, “that’s not my job!” frequently heard? Do employees withhold information to gain power rather than share it with those who need to know? Are e-mail communications problematic? Do employees trust each other? The resolution of problems in these and other areas is a great target for teambuilding. You may find this DOP course helpful: “Leadership Mastery - Creating Deliberate Success.” (Course No. 01-09-M229)